Angolan Leftists Say Rival Capital Seized

By Peter Mosley
Reuter

JOHANNESBURG, Jan. 5—The Soviet-backed Popular Movement for the Liberation of Angola said today that it had captured the headquarters of its northern opponent in a major offensive of the Angolan civil war.

A communique broadcast by Popular Movement-controlled Luanda Radio and monitored here said its troops captured the headquarters of the pro-Western National Front for the Liberation of Angola in Uige, formerly Carmona. The communique said several National Front positions were stormed and occupied on the weekend.

The Popular Movement's blitz had been predicted by intelligence reports here and was thought to be aimed at gaining the maximum territorial advantage before African leaders meet in Addis Ababa Saturday to seek an end to the Angola fighting.

If confirmed, the loss of Uige would be a catastrophic blow to the National Front, already demoralized and in disarray after constant barrages of Soviet-made missiles launched from vehicles under the control of Russian advisers. Tass, in a separate dispatch, also reported the capture of Uige.

Uige, capital of coffee-growing Uige Province, has come to be regarded as the spiritual home of the National Front. Apart from the military implications, its fall would be a major psychological setback to National Front leader Holden Roberto and his men.

The communique said Popular Movement forces destroyed two American aircraft on the airport runway at Uige and "recovered" hundreds of tons of war materiel including armored cars and transport vehicles. It gave no further details.

An earlier communique said the Popular Movement had captured the important air-base at Negage, about 165 miles northeast of Luanda, cutting off the airlift of arms and equipment from Western powers to the National Front.

The National Front confirmed in its own communique that Negage was about to fall, Agence France-Presse reported. The National Front said Popular Movement troops backed by Cubans and remnants of the Congolese Secessionist Katanga army were massacring women, children and old people as they pushed northward.

On the eastern front, heavy fighting was raging around Luso, recently captured by forces of the National Front and its civil war ally, the National Union for the Total Independence of Angola (UNITA). The Popular Movement said Luso had been "invaded by a South African armored column."

In other developments:

—The Times of Zambia quoted Red Cross officials in Angola as saying that more than 100,000 persons have been killed in the war and fewer than 30 doctors remain in the country of 6 million people.

—The official Libyan news agency Arna said Libya had recognized the Popular Movement as the legitimate government of Angola.

—Tha National Front denied a report by the Christian Science Monitor that 300 Americans trained by the Central Intelligence Agency are fighting in Angola.